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ABSTRACT

The reading comprehension assessment tool is a product developed for the Regional Educational Laboratory's (REL) initiative, Pacific Communities with High performance In Literacy Development, herein named the Pacific CHILD. This research project is focused on school improvement, especially as it relates to the teaching and learning of early reading at intensive school sites, also known as Co-Development Partner (CDP) schools, in the Pacific region. The assessment tool targets a reading comprehension strategy referred to as story structure. Intended for use with pre-readers/early readers, this "wordless" assessment tool is designed to purposefully elicit oral language evidence of the learner's ability to create story episodes and make connections between episodes. It is wordless, partially to address the needs of numerous pre-readers entering CDP schools and partially to address the varying language(s) of instruction across CDP sites. The task requires the learner to tell a story based on the visual prompts provided. The Pacific CHILD is designed to respond to three critical issues currently identified by Pacific educators: (1) the need to improve student performance in early reading; (2) the need for schools and communities to have better information about how well students are doing; and (3) the need for teachers and administrators to improve their teaching and learning skills by focusing on student achievement. This descriptive report is divided into the following sections: Introduction; Reading Comprehension Processes; The Assessment Tool; Initial Trials with Pacific Learners; and Future Considerations. Assessment Tool Drawings are appended. (Contains 20 references and 2 tables.) (NKA)

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ED 465 175

Making Episodes, Making Connections

A Reading Comprehension Assessment Tool

The REL's Pacific CHILD Project Year One Product

December 2001

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YEAR ONE PRODUCT

A READING COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT TOOL

The REL's Pacific CHILD Project
November 2001

MAKING EPISODES, MAKING CONNECTIONS
between story events

A pre-reader/early reader comprehension assessment tool
for use in local languages and English

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Introduction

The reading comprehension assessment tool is a product developed for the Regional Educational Laboratory's (REL) initiative, Pacific Communities with High performance In Literacy Development, herein named the Pacific CHILD. This research project is focused on school improvement, especially as it relates to the teaching and learning of early reading at intensive school sites, also known as Co-Development Partner (CDP) schools, in the Pacific region.

The assessment tool targets a reading comprehension strategy referred to as story structure. Intended for use with pre-readers/early readers, this "wordless" assessment tool is designed to purposefully elicit oral language evidence of the learner's ability to create story episodes and make connections between episodes. It is wordless, partially to address the needs of numerous pre-readers entering CDP schools and partially to address the varying language(s) of instruction across CDP sites.[1] The task requires the learner to tell a story based on the visual prompts provided. It is believed that most children have had some experience with stories, given that storytelling is an important cultural activity throughout the Pacific region (Koki, 1998). The tool has been developed, but its limited initial trials (N=10) call into question claims of validity and reliability. The assessment tool will be piloted in Year Two of the Pacific CHILD project to address validity and reliability concerns.

Background

The Pacific CHILD is designed to respond to three critical issues currently identified by Pacific educators: 1) the need to improve student performance in early reading; 2) the need for schools and communities to have better information about how well students are doing; and 3) the need for teachers and administrators to improve their teaching and learning skills by focusing on student achievement. One of the ways the Pacific CHILD project addresses these three interrelated issues is through supporting teachers' formative uses of appropriate early reading assessment tools in classrooms. Assessments used at CDP schools must be developed for use in English and, where appropriate, the local language of instruction (L1). In some cases both L1 and English are used as the language of instruction in primary grades. The importance of L1 literacy development, both in the continental U.S. and in the Pacific, is well documented.[2] Therefore, we sought to develop a product that would support learning to read in English and L1 (in this case, the local language of instruction at each CDP site).

Recent studies show that strengthening formative uses of assessment in the classroom can significantly improve learning gains (Black, 2001; Shepard, 2000). Stiggins (2001) confirms that "classroom assessment excellence" (p. 1) contributes to informed teaching practices and increased student achievement. Therefore, one focus of the Pacific CHILD project is to develop appropriate assessment tools to elicit and collect evidence of student performance in early reading that will inform instruction and, as a result, increase student achievement.

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[1] The CDP sites use either English, the local language (L1), or both as their language(s) of instruction.

[2] See a review of the literature related to literacy in indigenous communities by van Broekhuizen (2000) and a synthesis of the literature intended for Pacific educators on language use at home and school by Brown, Hammond, & Onidma (1997).

The REL's work in reading is based on a framework that aligns with the U.S. Department of Education's Reading First Initiative. This initiative is founded on the National Reading Panel (NRP) report *Teaching Children to Read*, an evidence-based review and assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. The Reading First Initiative identifies five components of reading in English that must be explicitly taught and assessed: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension. Many valid and reliable early reading classroom assessment tools are readily available for schools in which English is the language of instruction.[3] It is important to note that the NRP report and most reading assessment tools, such as those found in Reading Success Network's *Taking a Reading*, are based on teaching, learning, and assessing reading using print (text) materials.

A significant challenge in classroom assessment excellence for CDP schools where the language of instruction is not English is the availability of early reading assessments in the local language of instruction. It is our experience that valid English assessments for early reading are not always directly translatable to the local language, and even when they can be translated, they may not be valid and/or reliable. Hence, activities within the Pacific CHILD project must include the development of valid and reliable early reading assessment tools for use in the local languages of instruction at the CDP sites.

In the previous five year contract, the REL developed a three-part early reading test as a product of the Pacific Languages Use in Schools (PLUS) study. The PLUS test, consisting of consonant/sound identification, word recognition, and cloze procedures, was produced in nine Pacific languages: Carolinian, Chamorro, Chuukese, Kosraean, Marshallese, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Samoan, and Yapese. The PLUS study (2000) offers at least two important conclusions that support further development of first-language early reading classroom assessments:

- the need for first-language reading assessment development throughout the Region,
- the need for more professional development in effective reading instruction to students (p. 39).

In addition, many students entering Grade 1 in the CDP schools are pre-readers. For many entities this is the first year of formal schooling: Many children enter Grade 1 with little or no preschool experience. Therefore, for this current contract we took on the challenge of designing assessment tools that would not only complement the PLUS Study but also address pre-readers/early readers. An assessment tool that is "wordless"—based on non-print materials—seemed most appropriate to our purpose. One area of interest is in assessing pre-readers/early readers in comprehension processes—the "essence of reading" (Durkin, 1993)—which is one of the five components of print-based reading identified by the Reading First Initiative that must be explicitly taught and assessed.

In a search for a pre-reader comprehension assessment tool, we found none that met both the NRP criteria and explicitly addressed pre-reader/early reader comprehension processes with

[3] See for example, *Taking a Reading* by the Reading Success Network.

non-print materials. Given the difficulty of translating valid English assessment tools into numerous Pacific languages and being reminded of the importance of a language-rich environment for early readers (Lynn, 1997), we decided to create a pre-reader/early reader comprehension assessment using non-print materials. After addressing validity and reliability issues, we plan for this assessment tool to be used at CDP schools. It will also serve as the Year One REL product.

The assessment, *Making Episodes, Making Connections*, is at a conceptual stage of development and is intended to be used in six Pacific languages (Chuukese, Kosraean, Marshallese, Paulauan, Pohnpeian, and Yapese) as well as in English. It is an assessment tool designed to address one comprehension process of the pre-reader—making connections between story events—and is unique in that it uses non-print materials and therefore can be used across languages to elicit evidence of the learner's development of early comprehension strategies in non-reading events. We believe these strategies are similar to strategies used with print material.

This conceptual work is intended for educators interested in advancing the knowledge-base of comprehension strategies for pre-readers and in validating a related non-print assessment tool that forefronts story structure as an important pre-reading/early reading comprehension strategy. Our primary target group of learners is Pacific children, as we hope to address, in some small way, the three issues identified by Pacific educators.

Reading Comprehension Processes

The NRP report (2000, chap. 4, p. 1) identifies three important areas of reading comprehension:

(1) the critical role of vocabulary learning and instruction;
(2) critical active interactive strategic processes in the development of reading comprehension;
(3) the critical role of teacher preparation in the learner's development of reading comprehension.

The first area addresses vocabulary in reading comprehension. Hence, we sought to design an assessment tool that would address the integration of vocabulary in pre-reader/early reader comprehension processing. The second area focuses on the necessity of active interactive strategic processes to the development of reading comprehension. Hence, we included an active interactive component in the assessment design to promote and evoke the use of these strategic processes in reading comprehension by the pre-reader/early reader. The third area speaks to the preparation of teachers in order to facilitate these complex processes in the development of reading comprehension. Hence, we were mindful of the teacher preparation necessary not only to understand and administer the assessment tool but also to interpret the assessment information in a way that could be used to inform instruction.

In addition to these three areas, we wanted to address the role of knowledge in early literacy development. Neuman (2001) claims "the richness of knowledge about a topic or about the concepts embedded in activities has much to do with children's achievement" (p. 469). She reviews several technical reports primarily from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) in support of her claim. Drawing on her review, we acknowledge that the child's knowledge of the content domain and his/her language resources, especially vocabulary, will impact the results of the assessment. Therefore, we designed the assessment to elicit evidence of the learner's content vocabulary of a specific domain (e.g., the social world of cats, fish, and people as depicted visually in the assessment materials—see Appendix A, Set Two). The assessor is expected to interactively engage with the learner about the content of the visual stimulus to elicit active knowledge (see Glaser & Baxter, 2000), and a range of vocabulary items, including content and function words, noting what and how those items are used in assessment responses. The assessment tool informs classroom practice, raising the important issue of addressing essential skills such as multiple comprehension strategies and vocabulary "to be used to develop coherent understandings of knowledge and concepts, the basic foundation for later learning" (Neuman, 2001, p. 474).

Multiple Comprehension Strategies

The NRP report states that there is strong empirical evidence for the instruction of more than one comprehension strategy (chap. 4, p. 83). They offer 17 strategies that can be acquired and used successfully in reading comprehension when they are explicitly taught and assessed. Table 1 includes a substantial but inconclusive list of major strategies selected

from the comprehension strategies offered by NRP (2000, chap. 4, p. 82) and various teacher preparation texts on the teaching of reading.

Table 1. ***Major Comprehension Strategies and Related Examples of Reading Behaviors***

Major comprehension strategies	**Examples of reading behaviors related to strategies**
1. Control of the reading process	• tracks reading rate, speed • marks the text • engages in self-study
2. Monitoring of comprehension	• clarifies by asking questions • uses interrelated strategies such as predicting (foretelling or foreseeing, discerning or distinguishing texts to a future possibility) • constructs images • monitors one's own comprehension, metacognition (thinking about thinking) • thinks aloud, reflects, supposes, has an idea, guesses, or otherwise extrapolates by conjecture or speculation
3. Utilizing background knowledge	• relates one text to another • relates text to cultural and personal experiences, activating prior experience and knowledge about the world and language • recognizes connections between parts of text through similar past experiences • has knowledge of format/structure of text through past experiences with multiple texts • recognizes/imagines features of the text from having read/seen other similar texts
4. Interactions with the text	• re-reads • takes the text and does something to/with it • reads orally • re-tells • skims • scans
5. Developing word relations	• derives word meaning from morphemes, phonemes • recognizes words • uses context to derive meaning • uses cloze procedures for comprehension • explores word functions
6. Utilization of the text itself	• recognizes that stories are made up of a series of episodes or events that are systematically organized (story structure) • infers relationships between story events • examines the text, its format, context, structure, vocabulary • talks about how language works, meta-language (language about language)

All of the above are important comprehension strategies for the reader. However, in considering the social context of pre-readers/early readers, we chose to focus on the strategy of story structure under the category "utilization of the text itself." Although the assessment does not use a text, we saw the use of visuals in our assessment tool as a "text" for the pre-reader. What we are interested in is the learner's ability to "read" the visuals as a story; that is, we are interested in how they create episodic content and make connections between story events.

Utilization of the Text Itself: Story Structure

Story structure, an important comprehension strategy (Buss, Ratliff, & Irion, 1985; NRP, 2000), is "systematically organized into episodes and...the plot of a story is a series of episodes" (NRP, 2000, chap. 4, p. 88). To help learners access story episodes and their relation to each other, Harris and Hodges (1995) suggest using story maps, time lines, or semantic maps to "show the meaning of relationships between events or concepts in the text, regardless of their order" (pp. 243-244). van den Broek's 2001 study focuses on pre-readers and story structure. He found that pre-readers' identification of connections between story events (TV, auditory, and visually presented narratives) seems to be not only a process largely independent of basic literacy skills but also a better predictor of later reading comprehension. A synthesis of this scientific research indicates the importance of the pre-reader's ability to recognize the various episodes or events in a story and the connections between such events.

Phillips (2000) claims that the use of visual images has a significant role in learning to read. She provides examples of how "creating images first can help descriptive language in both English and the first language to emerge" (p. 6). While the assessment tool introduced in this paper does not ask the learner to create the image, we extend Phillips's ideas to use visuals to elicit story structures and their connections as a medium for pre-readers.

A rationale for the assessment and instruction of story structure and its connected events is in provided in Table 2. While recognizing that multiple strategies are always at work in the process of reading, we believe that a pre-reader primarily relies on activating prior knowledge and utilizing knowledge of story structure to tell a story in non-reading events (e.g., from pictures). We are also reminded of Neuman's concern with the role of knowledge (2001)—that the oral story told is largely dependent on the language resources (especially vocabulary) and the associated content knowledge available to the learner.

Table 2. ***A Comprehension Strategy: Making Connections Between Story Events***

Definition and rationale of instruction	**Assessment tool: *Making Episodes, Making Connections***	**Practices informed by assessment data**
Instruction is aimed at teaching students how stories are made up of connected story events or episodes.	Use *Making Episodes, Making Connections.* Teacher assesses oral telling of a story (Part One and Part Two)	Teachers ask learners to map connections between such story episodes as orientation, complication, and resolution. Learners are asked to explain and defend the connections they make (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993).
Children who are familiar with stories know about genre. However, instruction in episodic content (the who, what, where, when, why, what happened, and what was done of stories) aids in comprehension.	*Making Episodes* (Part Three)	Teachers teach students to recognize episodic content by asking and responding to: the who, what, where, when, why, what happened, and what was done of stories.
Making many connections between story events should improve comprehension and memory of story by engaging the learner more actively in the reading process.	*Making Connections* (Part Four)	Teachers model or show learners how to make logical connections between episodes (often done through the use of conjunctions). Learners identify and use conjunctions for specific connections (e.g., causal, sequential).

Story Episodes and Structure (Connections) in Some Pacific Cultures

We anticipate that episodic content and story structure will vary among languages/cultures. Therefore, we did not want to design an assessment tool biased by the conventional Western story structure (genre) of orientation, complication, and resolution. Nor did we want to assume that all stories contain episodic content that answers the questions of who, what, where, when, why, what happened, and what was done. We have begun to research story episodes and structures in the Pacific region and although there is further work to be done, early findings suggest that there are many similarities to Western story structure. The differences seem to be in content, order, and expectations of participants in the storytelling event.

Hawai'i. Hawaiian stories were primarily used to record and explain spiritual phenomena and factual events and to preserve the values and wisdom of the heritage. Many of the stories begin with an orientation, quickly giving rise to a problem that is resolved by the end

of the story. They are often about people's relationships with their gods (experiences with the supernatural world), people's relationships with nature (living off the land, making things from the land), and people's relationships with each other (marriage, childbirth, illness, death). Characters in these stories often portray heroes and heroines, people in conflict, angry gods, or tricksters. These stories speak of the people of old Hawai'i (Alameida, 1997; Koki, 1998).

Chuuk. Chuukese oral story traditions focus on morality, respect, and obedience. They often start with a problem, are not necessarily linear in structure, and have many parts related in different ways. Children are expected to be active listeners by asking questions and responding to questions asked by the storyteller. Many written Chuukese stories have an English (Western) story structure with an element of imagination. (K. Petrus, personal communication, August 10, 2001).

Palau. Palauan oral story traditions usually include a ghost and often are about finding food, helping older people or poor people, or protecting the environment. Oral stories often start with an introduction of the characters or with a problem. The story concludes with a solution to the problem and often reinforces Palauan values. Children are expected to listen and not ask questions. (F. Swords & E. Ruluked, personal communication, October 15, 2001).

While story structure in various Pacific cultures must be more fully explored, it appears that the episodic content of stories from three Pacific cultures does respond to questions appropriate to Western story episodes, although the content itself may differ. Pacific stories also contain many connections between story episodes. To minimize bias and distortion of the assessment tool, a complete review of the cultural variants of story episodes and connections in the Pacific entities will be completed during the piloting of this product in Year Two of the REL contract.

The Assessment Tool

Stiggins (2001) characterizes quality assessment design as follows:

1) it arises from and reflects clear and appropriate targets;
2) it has a focused purpose;
3) it uses a method that can elicit the valued target;
4) it offers a representative sample exercise (task) that will yield valid conclusions; and
5) it controls sources of bias and distortion to maximize the reliability of the assessment.

Making Episodes, Making Connections was designed as a high-quality multi-language assessment tool for use in the Pacific region. It addresses Stiggins' five criteria in the following ways.

1) *Two clear and appropriate targets* for this pre-reader/early reader comprehension assessment product are a) making story episodes and b) making story connections.

   The NRP report (2000, chap. 4, p. 1) states that "comprehension is critically important to development of children's reading skills." Their findings also state that one effective instructional approach is the use of multiple strategies, including but not limited to story structure instruction. The strategy of story structure instruction involves learners in using reason in the following ways:

   - to make/recognize episodic content
   - to know/use related vocabulary
   - to make connections between episodes (or apply psycholinguistic strategies involving logical connectors).

   The clear and appropriate targets for this assessment are based on the evidence-based scientific research literature summarized by the NRP.

   An assessment possesses content validity when it accurately reflects its intended target (Stiggins, 2001). Given that this tool will be used in multiple Pacific languages and cultures, including English, where story structures and psycholinguistic connections may vary, at this time we claim content validity in English only. While early piloting shows promise, further research and piloting in Pacific languages is necessary before this assessment can be regarded as valid across Pacific languages and cultures.

2) *A focused purpose* for this assessment relates to knowing how the results will be used. The intended users of this assessment tool are teachers. The intended uses of the assessment information are primarily aimed at the classroom level to a) inform teaching practices and b) increase student achievement in early reading. The assessment can also provide information on how well students perform in early reading achievement when making episodes and connections.

When the evidence collected from assessment tools is interpreted and used as feedback in reference to desired levels of performance (such as standards), it can be effectively used to modify teaching and learning activities and so ultimately benefit the learner (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Teachers should be able to adjust their practices to close the gap between actual student learning and the desired level of performance indicated by standards and their related benchmarks.

The desired learning outcomes or targets are often expressed as benchmarks within stated standards. Where standards and benchmarks are available, teachers need to be familiar with them and share their understandings with the students in ways that students can understand. The students can then apply these tools in self-assessments and in interpreting teacher evaluative feedback.

Most reading standards in the Pacific region do not specify a desired level of performance related to story structure. The use of this assessment tool has the potential to inform reading standards and related benchmarks in the Region.

When the assessment serves its intended purpose, it is valid. We believe that this assessment potentially provides the information needed to improve instruction when it has content validity. In performing the limited number of pilots done to date, we realized that professional development is needed for teachers in the Region. They need to become familiar with the elements of story structure appropriate to language and culture in their entity. This familiarity will help teachers establish benchmarks for a reading standard on story structure.

3) *A proper method* is used to elicit evidence of an indication of the learner's ability to invent story episodes and make story connections. The chosen assessment method is performance assessment based on observation and judgment.

Performance assessment is capable of accurately reflecting the kinds of outcomes teachers will assess: making story episodes and making story connections. The learner is asked to create episodes orally from a series of pictures. The teacher probes the learner to elicit vocabulary related to episodic content. The learner is then asked to relate orally a reasoned story based on the pictures, making story episodes and connections between story episodes. The learner's performance will be influenced primarily by their familiarity with (or prior knowledge of) story structures and with the visually presented content, their language resources (vocabulary and logical connectors), and their auditory discrimination. This last is necessary in order for these students to interact with the assessor.

4) *Sound sampling* of appropriate exercises could be used to determine what the learner can actually do in making story episodes and making story connections

There are many activities that learners can engage in, such as independent or collaborative story structure mapping, read alouds, shared reading, short answer questions, focused psycholinguistic activities on linking words between story events, and re-telling. While we believe that *Making Episodes, Making Connections* represents a sample of these activities that will yield confident conclusions about the

elicited evidence of what the learner can actually do, we cannot yet claim that this tool samples the achievement target in a comprehensive manner across languages and cultures. Hence, we cannot yet claim validity for this assessment. We also recognize that professional development will be required for teachers using this assessment.

5) *Control of bias and distortion* are affected by unique sources of varying cultural and linguistic interferences. While specific training with assessors works to limit biased judgments, we recognize that resulting scores will be impacted by evaluator prejudice (e.g., one's cultural bias of what constitutes a "proper" story structure). Until content validity can be confirmed by applied linguists and recognized storytellers of the various Pacific entities in which we work, the reliability of this assessment tool is minimized.

   The assessment tool requires a year of piloting in English and the six Pacific languages identified earlier. During the pilot year, Pacific language linguists and storytellers will review the assessment tool to address questions of validity and reliability. Professional development activities will be conducted for Pacific region teachers to support their understanding of the assessment tool's target, purpose, method, and sampling. Teachers will be involved in administering the assessment, interpreting the evidence recorded, and providing feedback both to learners and to teachers in order to inform their practices. This will determine the value of the assessment as a tool to improve teaching practices in reading comprehension processes, to increase student achievement in reading, and to provide better information about how learners are doing in reading comprehension achievement.

The Frame of the Assessment Tool

There are four parts of the assessment tool:

Part One—The teacher has a brief conversation with the learner about his/her home "reading environment" to help him/her feel more at ease and to develop a context for interpreting the assessment information.

Part Two—The teacher models by telling a story using three pictures and then the learner tells a story on his/her own or through the use of three different but related pictures.

Part Three—The learner describes one of the story images in detail. This description also acts as a "brainstorming" activity to generate more ideas for story episodes and connections in preparation for the telling of the second story, hence giving the child maximum opportunity to make story episodes and story connections.

Part Four—The learner re-orders the three pictures (if the child chooses to use the pictures) and tells another (second) story. It is the second story that is evaluated.

The assessment tool, *Making Episodes, Making Connections*, follows.

A PRE-READER/EARLY READER COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT TOOL

MAKING EPISODES, MAKING CONNECTIONS

between story events

Pacific CHILD
REL, PREL
November 2001

ASSESSMENT—Making Episodes, Making Connections

Purpose: To elicit evidence of the student's ability to construct the who, what, where, when, and why of stories, as well as what happened, and what was done (episodic content) and to make reasoned connections between such episodes in a non-reading event.

Factors related to the learner's ability to accomplish this task include:

1) oral language development (use of vocabulary to construct episodes and logical connectors such as "because," "and," "however," "next," and "finally" to connect episodes),

2) auditory discrimination (necessary to benefit from the assessor's active role in the assessment),

3) prior knowledge (the more background experiences the child has related to the images in the pictures, the more episodic content they will have the potential to produce, the more background experiences with stories will contribute to a developing sense of story structure).

Scoring:

A. This assessment uses anecdotal comments to record examples of the learner's:

- stated literacy behaviors at home (Part One),
- oral language development and activation of prior knowledge (Part Two),
- vocabulary used for episodic content (Part Three).

B. This assessment uses a checklist to convey evaluative judgments about story episodic knowledge and about the learner's ability to make connections between story episodes. Checks are given for episodic content and for making reasoned connections between episodes (connecting orientation, complication, resolution). See specific score sheet for instructions (Part Four).

INSTRUCTIONS

Part One—Record Anecdotal Comments

Model the telling of a story using three pictures.
Say to the child, ***"I'm going to move the pictures around first and then tell a story."***
Move the pictures around several times so that the child will understand that he/she can do the same when it is his/her turn.
Tell your story making several connections beyond sequence (make some causal connections).
Say, "_____ ***and then*** _____" (sequence)
Say, "_____ ***because*** _____" (causal)
Then say, ***"Now it's your turn to tell me a story. I will give you three different pictures for your story."***

Part Two—Record Anecdotal Comments

Have the child tell a story (the child can tell a story without using pictures or choosing a set of three pictures—e.g., the "cat" pictures—record picture order).
Say, ***"You can move these pictures in any way that you want."***
Then say, ***"Tell me a story using these pictures."***
After he/she tells a story ask, ***"Have you ever seen/done that before? When? Where?"***
Ask, ***"If the cat/lady/fish could talk, what would she/it say? Tell me more."***

Part Three—Record Anecdotal Comments

Using one picture or image, elicit vocabulary (see vocabulary recording sheet).
Say, ***"Choose one of the pictures/images for us to talk about in more detail."***
Say, ***"Who/what is in the picture? What are they trying to do?"***
Next say, ***"How do you know that's a _____?"***
Other questions you can ask to elicit vocabulary or content words:
"What does it/he/she look like?"
"Where is this? What is it like there?"
"What is happening in the picture?"
"Why do you think they (it/he/she) are (is) doing that?"
"What should they do about the situation?"
"Is that a good idea?"
"What would you do?"
Where appropriate, record the content words the child uses and comment.

Part Four—Record on Checklist

Have the child tell a second story with the same three pictures (or have them tell a similar story without the pictures) and note the number of connections the child makes in the story.
Say, ***"I want you to tell me another story using the same three pictures. You can arrange these pictures in any way that you want."***
Once the story begins, you can say, ***"Tell me more."***
Record the number of story event connections the child makes and comment.

Making Episodes, Making Connections

Name _____
Grade _____ Date _____
Teacher _____ School _____

PART ONE: CONVERSATION WITH LEARNER (record responses)

- Do you enjoy being told/reading stories at home?
- Who tells/reads you stories?
- How often?
- What kind of stories? What are they about?
- Do you have picture books at home? Do you watch TV? Do you talk with anyone about what you watch?
- Note any contextual information related to the assessment (does the child seem distracted, sick, or have a short attention span?)

PART TWO: LEARNER TELLS STORY

First story—record only picture order. Comment on first story.

Picture order of Story 1:

Comments on first story (evidence of oral language development—vocabulary and use of logical connectors, auditory discrimination, evidence of activating prior knowledge):

PART THREE: VOCABULARY

Name/date: _____
Teacher/grade: _____
School: _____

Story episodes: Does the learner demonstrate knowledge of episodic content?	Evidence of what the learner can do – Record sample vocabulary used by learner to create story episodes.
Who? Where? When? Why? What happened? What got done?	

Story connections	Evidence of what the learner can do – Record samples of logical connectors the learner uses to make connections.
Examples in English – e.g., sequence—first, next, then e.g., causal—because, since, caused	

PART FOUR – MAKING STORY EPISODES AND CONNECTIONS (2nd story)

Name/date/grade: _____

Teacher/school: _____

Story 2 – record order of pictures:

Score learner responses as follows:
√ check if the response includes any of the episodic content listed in each cell:

√	Episodic content	√	Reasoned story connections
	Orientation Who? What? Where? When? Why?		Between orientation and complication
	Complication What happened?		Between complication and resolution
	Resolution What was done?		Between resolution and orientation

Comments:

After the assessment, record oral language samples the learner used below.

Vocabulary samples from episodic content	Logical connectors from making connections

Initial Trials With Pacific Learners

Once conceptualized and designed, the assessment was piloted with several pre-readers/early readers in different languages. Brief narrative statements of our experience using the assessment tool appear below. Besides evaluating the quality of the tool, we wanted to know if the kind of feedback it provided would help inform instruction.

Comments from Hawai'i
Summary of kindergarten and Grade 1 English speakers' responses during the assessment:

- One kindergarten student got very excited when he saw the pictures. His first story was very linear, and the few connections he made between pictures were identified through the repeated words "and then." Initial vocabulary responses were minimal, but once prompted, he began to use his imagination and his vocabulary usage doubled. His second story was embellished with detail. It was not linear, and he jumped from picture to picture in a seemingly undetermined manner. He made many connections that were primarily sequential.

  Context: He told us his mother and sister read him stories every day and that he has a dog that doesn't like cats. He watches TV with his sister.

- Another kindergarten student did not seem so interested in the pictures, and it was difficult to keep his attention. He placed the pictures in an order but made few connections. His vocabulary was weak although he knew the concepts he was trying to express. For example, he didn't know the word "whiskers," but he did know that cats had them. His second story increased in connections to four, but it was evident that he did not have a strong sense of story structure. His story seemed circular in that he kept returning to the cat eating the fish. The connections were all sequential.

  Context: He told us that he had no picture books at home and that he didn't like to "read" stories or have them read to him. He watches TV by himself.

- A Grade 1 student was very enthusiastic when she saw the pictures and immediately began to ask questions about the cat and the lady in the picture. She readily told a story, provided evidence of a developed vocabulary, and made 14 connections in her second story. She used logical connectors such as "next," "then," "because," "and," "before," and "first." Her storytelling seemed goal-oriented in that it focused on how the cat was going to fill the basket with fish.

  Context: She is reading, loves stories, and is read to and/or reads to others every night. She watches a limited amount of TV at home.

- Another Grade 1 student had difficulty telling a story based on the pictures. His story lacked a sense of structure and his vocabulary was limited. Even prompting by the assessor did not elicit evidence of a stronger vocabulary. His second story increased by three connections, but he was not motivated or interested in engaging his

imagination. His story was very fragmented and unconnected. He said he liked the story told by the assessor.

Context: He told us that he did not have any picture books at home and that he would rather play with his friends than read a story. He likes to play with his Gameboy. He sometimes watches TV, but he doesn't talk about what he watches.

Summary of a Grade 1 Chuukese student's responses during the assessment:

- This student was shy. He had recently arrived from Chuuk and was in a Grade 1 classroom in which English was the language of instruction. He showed surprise when the assessor spoke Chuukese with him and seemed confused about what was being asked of him. Once the pictures were shown to him and the assessor told a story, he became interested in the assessment. He told a story that was recognized by the assessor as a common oral story told about respecting animals. He was able to make six different connections, though his Chuukese vocabulary remained limited throughout the assessment period. He seemed to like the pictures and embellished his story when prompted by the phrase "tell me more."

  Context: He told us his sister tells him stories in Chuukese almost every day, and he watches a lot of TV in English but does not understand what he is watching. There was evidence of meaning connections and a sense of story structure. The assessor felt his limited vocabulary was holding him back.

Comments from Palau:
Piloted with Grade 1 students in Palau in the local language, Palauan.

Summary of Grade 1 students' responses during the assessment:

- One student was a good storyteller—she made 11 connections in the second story, brought a lot of background experience to the story, and used a variety of vocabulary. The second story had more connections than the first and was more detailed and creative. She told a theme-based story of the cat sharing his fish with the old lady.

  Context: This student is told stories every evening by her Nanny (the relationship of the Nanny to the child is not clear) and although she doesn't own any books, she borrows regularly from the library. The number of connections she made is supported by the home literacy environment she described. She has a TV in her home and often talks with her sister about the shows they watch together.

- Another student told a story about each individual picture but did not connect the pictures. In total he made three connections between story events. This student kept asking for reinforcement (e.g., Is it a cat? Does a cat eat fish?). His vocabulary was minimal and there was little change in his second story. He told the assessor he did not have a cat. His "story" was a simple naming of what he saw in each picture.

Context: This student is rarely told stories and does not have any age-appropriate books at home. His lack of connections and sense of story structure is supported by the home literacy environment he described and his unfamiliarity with cats. He does not have a TV in his home.

From these few narratives, it is evident that most learners would benefit from further work in vocabulary development. Some students need help in recognizing episodic content in stories. Most would benefit from work with logical connectors (e.g., story mapping that shows connections, groups of words that relate to order or sequence). It seems that the information gleaned from this assessment tool has the potential to inform instruction.

What We Are Learning About the Assessment

Early indications of the assessment data suggest that there are a range of story structures that children use across languages and cultures in the Pacific region, including English (goal-oriented, linear, theme-based, fragmented, circular). While we draw no conclusions, there was little evidence that a consistent story structure related to culture (for example, in the Palauan trials, a variety of story structures were used by the learners). We still have much to learn about the dominant oral storytelling traditions of the Region and the various ways that logical connections are expressed in Pacific languages.

A number of themes and issues emerging from the initial field trials with the assessment tool, *Making Episodes, Making Connections*, are summarized below.

Home, School, Culture and Reading Connections

It was evident that the assessment results across groups were influenced by the amount of experience with stories and with the content of the pictures provided, suggesting that the learner's preschool language experience with stories is important in acquiring knowledge about story structure. Initial trials also indicate recurring evidence of links between the home literacy environment and the number of connections children were making between story events, regardless of the language: When there were minimal literacy events at home, minimal connections were made by the learner in his/her oral story. In one context, the children were familiar with an instructional practice of responding to questions and had minimal experience in creating a text, and it took a while for them to feel comfortable in creating a story on their own. This evidence led us to wonder, does access to texts and different cultural attitudes about what types of reading are important shape the number and kind of connections (and strategies) that readers use and develop? And, in cultures where children are expected to listen and not ask questions during storytelling, how will their performance on this assessment task be affected? While many of the children who made fewer connections said they watch a lot of TV, they said they don't talk about what they watch and most of the time they don't remember the shows they watch. This suggests that they are not making use of the potential for making meaning connections that such non-reading story events as TV offer. It may also be that the TV programs are in English, a language the child may be unfamiliar with. For us, this raised another important question: In what ways does interactivity (conversations with others) around stories impact reading comprehension and is the performance of telling and re-telling a story culturally and/or experientially based? If story structure, as a pre-reader/early reader comprehension strategy,

is important for the learners we teach (and we suspect it is), these questions must be addressed.

Visuals, Knowledge, and Language

The assessment, as currently designed, uses a pre-chosen set of visuals. The child does not have a selection of pictures to chose from but must tell a story based on the set of three pictures provided (see Appendix A, Set Two). As children looked at the three pictures, we were reminded of Neuman's (2001) comment on the role of knowledge, as some children seemed unfamiliar with the "ways of cats." We wondered how this lack of knowledge of cats and the associated vocabulary influences a child's creation of episodes and their connections. A number of students confused the cat with a dog or seal, this being an instrument error. While we thought we had chosen the pictures appropriately, we realized pictures need to have obvious connections to which children in the Pacific region can relate. This raised another question for us: Are Pacific children more comfortable with a series of pictures or a detailed picture of many events (e.g., a Palauan storyboard) or is there some other more appropriate stimulus for storytelling? One suggestion was to give children a choice of pictures (validating the pictures by teachers and students who will use them) and/or invite the child to tell their own story without the use of pictures. The prompt in Part Two and Part Four of the assessment tool was changed to address this concern. The issue regarding visual content and display is yet to be resolved.

Another issue raised through the initial trials was that the use of pictures forces the child to tell the story in the third person—this may be difficult for some children who are more comfortable telling personal stories in the first person. This is a linguistic concern that needs to be explored further.

Informing Practice

While a checklist serves the initial task of recording what the learner can do, it is very general and complex in its content and may be for teachers to use to inform their instruction. While it serves the immediate need, our plan is to develop a rating scale that establishes grade level benchmarks as criteria to be used for judgment purposes. This will be done using the student response data collected in the piloting of the assessment in Year Two.

Teacher preparation will be necessary since standards and benchmarks are not established in this area of reading comprehension. Many teachers will know intuitively about story structure but may not have enough understanding to affect changes in their teaching practices. If we can work to develop culturally appropriate content knowledge of story structure and use the data and actual stories learners tell to develop benchmarks and criteria, then this assessment tool will contribute to informed reading comprehension instruction.

Many of the questions raised throughout the development of this tool have been responded to in a number of revisions. Yet, several key questions from the initial trials still remain and offer potential for future research:

- What are the different ways logical connections are expressed in Pacific languages?

- Oral language development is important to the performance of this task. How does a child's level of oral language development impact their ability to demonstrate their knowledge of episodic content and story connections?

- Some of the children didn't know the L1 word for "story" and so the assessor had to use English. Is reliability minimized/maximized if two languages are used to administer the assessment?

- What impact does motivation have on the assessment information?

These are important questions for research in classroom assessment, especially where the social context is culturally and linguistically diverse. We must carefully consider the implications of our work in such contexts, involving local language specialists whenever appropriate as we prepare this tool, and others, for use in schools.

Future Considerations

Making Episodes, Making Connections holds promise in that it draws the assessor's attention to an important area of reading comprehension: story structure, vocabulary, and content knowledge. Eliciting evidence of the learner's ability to construct episodic content and then make connections with non-print materials such as pictures can inform teachers' practices in support of learners early in their reading lives, giving students more opportunity to become successful lifelong readers.

While we do not claim that the assessment information gathered about early readers in the initial trials can be used to predict later reading comprehension, what we have learned is how we can inform classroom practices that will enhance the ability of children to make meaning connections from text and other non-reading events, an activity that has the potential to deepen knowledge and develop associated vocabulary, factors in improving learning achievement (Neuman, 2001).

Interpreting the information gathered from this assessment will help teachers become more specifically aware of the role language plays in stories. This will help inform practice and improve the learner's ability to construct episodes and their connections. This assessment supports the contention that oral language and its development, learning processes, and acquisition of knowledge are integrally linked to connection-making and comprehension.

For use as a classroom assessment tool, *Making Episodes, Making Connections* requires a year of piloting to develop into a valid and reliable instrument for assessing pre-reader/early reader comprehension. Cultural bias and distortion need to be controlled through a rigorous review process involving Pacific language linguists and teachers and by using the assessment in classrooms to see if it indeed informs practice in efficient and effective ways. Helping teachers become more aware of what pre-readers/early readers can actually do in making story episodes and their connections has the potential to impact teaching and learning. Providing an early start for pre-readers in building oral comprehension pathways we believe will contribute significantly to later experiences of children learning comprehension processing with print.

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Appendix A

Set One: Boat upright, swimmer in water, boat overturned

By Teachers of Pohnpei: Image to Word 2001, PREL.

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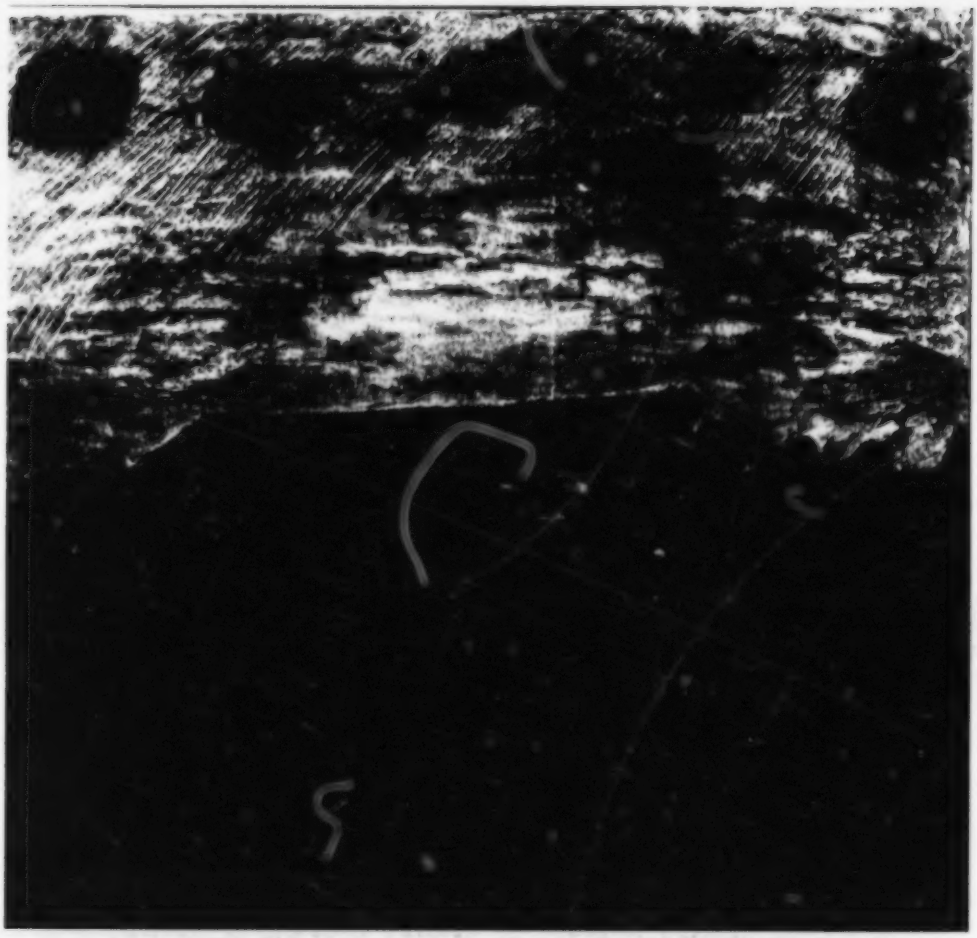

By Teachers of Pohnpei: Image to Word 2001, PREL.

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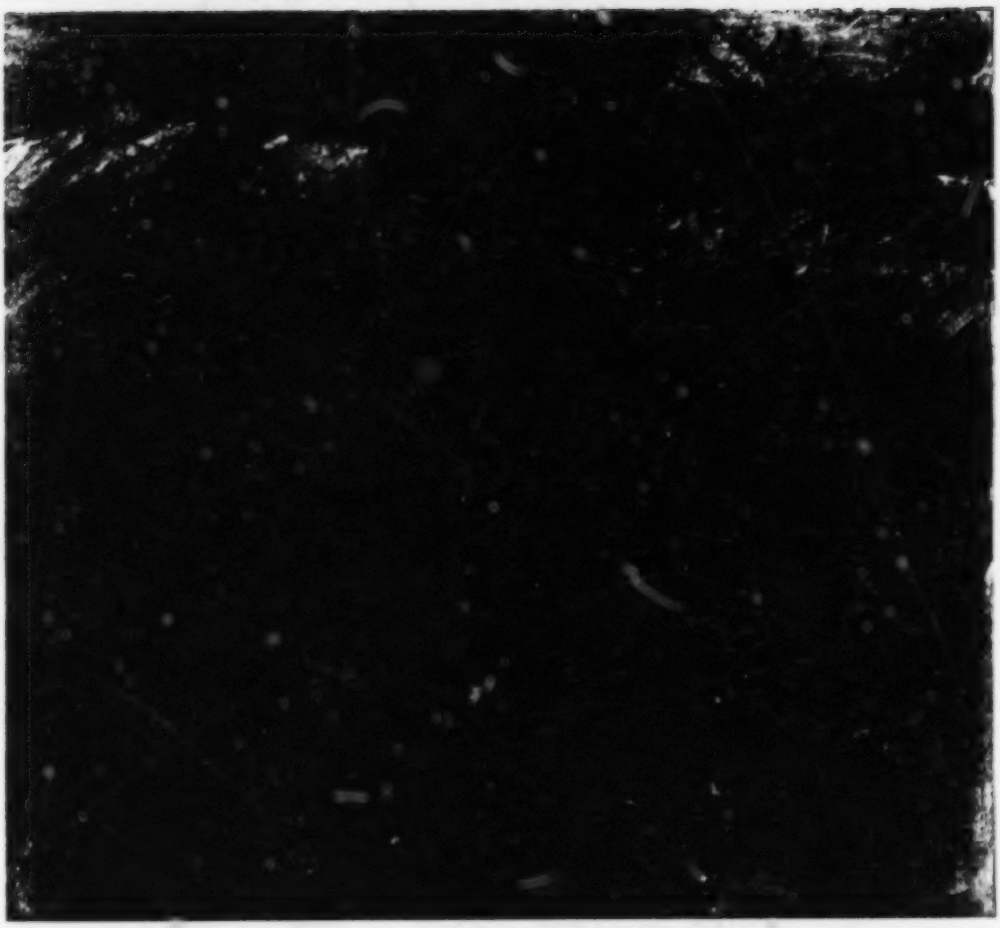

By Teachers of Pohnpei: Image to Word 2001, PREL.

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Appendix A

Set Two: Cat with fish in mouth, cat with fish in basket, cat and lady

By Teachers of Pohnpei: Image to Word 2001, PREL.

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By Teachers of Pompei: Image to Word 2001, PRTI.

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By Teachers of Pohnpei: Image to Word 2001, PREL

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